



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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**CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY IS AWARDED A \$2 MILLION GRANT FROM THE MELLON FOUNDATION TO MAKE BLACK HISTORY MORE ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC**

*The library's largest collections grant ever received to support the Renaissance Project which enhances the library's special collections and archival materials of rich Black cultural and historical resources.*

On behalf of Chicago Public Library (CPL), the Chicago Public Library Foundation (CPLF) has received a historic \$2 million grant from the Mellon Foundation to power **the Renaissance Project**, which supports access to Black history-related archives across library branches in the City of Chicago.

"The Renaissance Project offers a significant opportunity to contribute to the city's priorities around equity," said **Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot**. "I applaud Chicago Public Library and Commissioner Chris Brown for building on our long tradition of championing diverse narratives, uplifting marginalized voices and engaging the city in educational and cultural development, underscoring a powerful opportunity to contribute to racial healing in Chicago."

This transformational funding will allow the library to digitize and process critical documents related to Black history from the 1800s to the present, bring high-quality research materials and holistic programming to every branch across the city, and support the learning of Black history for a new generation of K-12 Illinois students of all races and backgrounds. This generous grant will also empower first-generation scholars to foster new research in Black Studies.

"Our African American stories and histories are our country's story," said **Chicago Public Library Commissioner Chris Brown**. "If these stories are not accessible, generations miss the chance to connect with who we are as a country. Mellon's grant will do just that, connecting generations and international audiences with African American histories."

The largest collection of African American history, literature and scholarship in the Midwest was built in 1932 under the leadership of CPL's first Black librarian and



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branch director, Vivian G. Harsh. The collection, now known as the Vivian Harsh Research Collection, is located at CPL's Woodson Regional Library. "CPL will continue to honor Harsh's work by fostering greater access to Black-history-related collections for everyone," said **Stacie Williams, CPL Division Chief of Archives and Special Collections**.

As part of this multi-year initiative, CPL will also partner with educators connected to the Illinois State Board of Education's Inclusive American History Commission (IAHC) to create new open-source curricula and tools that inform teaching of Black history in public secondary and post-secondary schools.

"As Illinois moves towards more inquiry-based, inclusive, and just learning experiences for students in K-12 and college classrooms, this grant is creating opportunities for teachers to better access curricular resources and pedagogical insights supporting that aspiration," said **Asif Wilson, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign**. As co-investigator, Wilson will chair an advisory group of educators who will make recommendations on how the materials can be used in curriculum and assignments.

Protecting and empowering educators with inclusive narratives, knowledge and ideas, particularly at a time when topics are being banned or discouraged across the nation, is at the core of CPL's mission. The Mellon Foundation's support will amplify this collection of history that will be used by many stakeholders locally and nationally.

"The narrative power of primary sources held in special collections and archives that are relevant to Ethnic Studies have become more critical to advocate for in the last several years," said Patricia Hswe, program officer for Public Knowledge at the Mellon Foundation. "We are pleased to support CPL in this objective as it casts a well-deserved spotlight on Black Studies through the Library's multivocal collections and increases the scale of user access to them."

The project began February 2023 and will be completed in March 2027.

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## About Chicago Public Library

Since 1873, Chicago Public Library (CPL) has encouraged lifelong learning by welcoming all people and offering equal access to information, entertainment, and knowledge through innovative services, programs, and technology. Through its 81 locations, the Library provides free access to a rich collection of materials, both



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physical and digital, and presents the highest quality author discussions, exhibits, and programs for children, teens, and adults. For more information, please call (312) 747-4300 or visit [chipublic.org](http://chipublic.org). To follow CPL on social media, visit us on Twitter (@chipublic), Facebook (Chicago Public Library), or Instagram (@chicagopubliclibrary).

### **About the Chicago Public Library Foundation**

The Chicago Public Library Foundation (CPLF) is an independent nonprofit that exists to accelerate the potential of our public library by investing in resources that transform lives and communities. Together with its civic-minded partners, CPLF makes pathways to learning, creativity, and civic engagement accessible to Chicagoans of all ages through investment across three funding priority areas: Closing the Academic Opportunity Gap; Activating Creativity & Connection for All; and Bridging the Digital Divide. Find us online at [www.cplfoundation.org](http://www.cplfoundation.org)

### **About the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation's largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence and freedom that can be found there. Through its grants, the foundation seeks to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive. Learn more at [www.mellon.org](http://www.mellon.org)